

PA AND EXTERNAL TERRACES WITH STRUCTURES AT POOR HILL (SITE P5/227), WAIMATE NORTH

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Abstract. In 1967 site P5/227, Poor Hill (Ngaungau pa), near Waimate North, inland Bay of Islands was mapped after the ridge had been cleared of scrub. Three small excavations were carried out on terraces external to the pa. The lowest terrace produced a rectangle of large postholes suggesting that a big structure once stood there. The other two excavations also indicated the use of terraces for houses and living. Lack of any European artefacts and the traditional evidence suggest a late 18th century date for the site.

In 1967, the presence of an unusual archaeological site P5/227 (N15/43), in the inland Bay of Islands near Waimate North, was brought to the attention of Janet Davidson, then archaeologist at the Auckland Institute and Museum, by Bob Lawn of the New Zealand Forest Service, Kaikohe. The site had been covered in scrub but, after clearing, evidence of Maori occupation was clearly visible. Janet Davidson, Bob and Betty Lawn and I visited the site in September, 1967. A plane-table map was made and a brief test excavation was carried out on one of the terraces where the presence of postholes was established. Arrangements were then made for a further investigation to be done by Ken Gorbey and Trevor Hanson before the area was disced and brought into pasture. This paper describes the site and presents the results of the excavations.

At the time of our field work the area was known locally as "Poor Hill" (Fig. 1) and no Maori name could be found. Subsequent research by Jack Lee (pers. comm.) suggests that the site is very probably Ngaungau pa.

Eldson Best (1927:228) includes Ngaungau pa in his discussion of a group of pa along the plateau edge north of Ohaeawai and associates them with the Ngati Pou and the Nga Puhī. He also includes plans of some of the pa (1927:182-190) but there is some confusion over the names attributed to each site and their subsequent New Zealand Archaeological Association site numbers (the site numbers shown in Fig. 1 and names given in the caption are an attempt to clarify the relative positions of these sites). It has been suggested that site P5/227 was the most eastern of the group of complex sites protecting the plateau edge from Ohaeawai east and north of the Titahi Stream (F. Barrett, pers. comm.):

Turton in his *Maori Deeds* (1882:98/VII) states that about 20 acres were purchased by Richard Davis, the missionary, in 1836 and that on "The . . . land was a pa (fortification) and its name is Ngaungau. Bounded on the west by the the land purchased by Mr Davis of Kotahi: on the south by the Waikaramu stream or the land

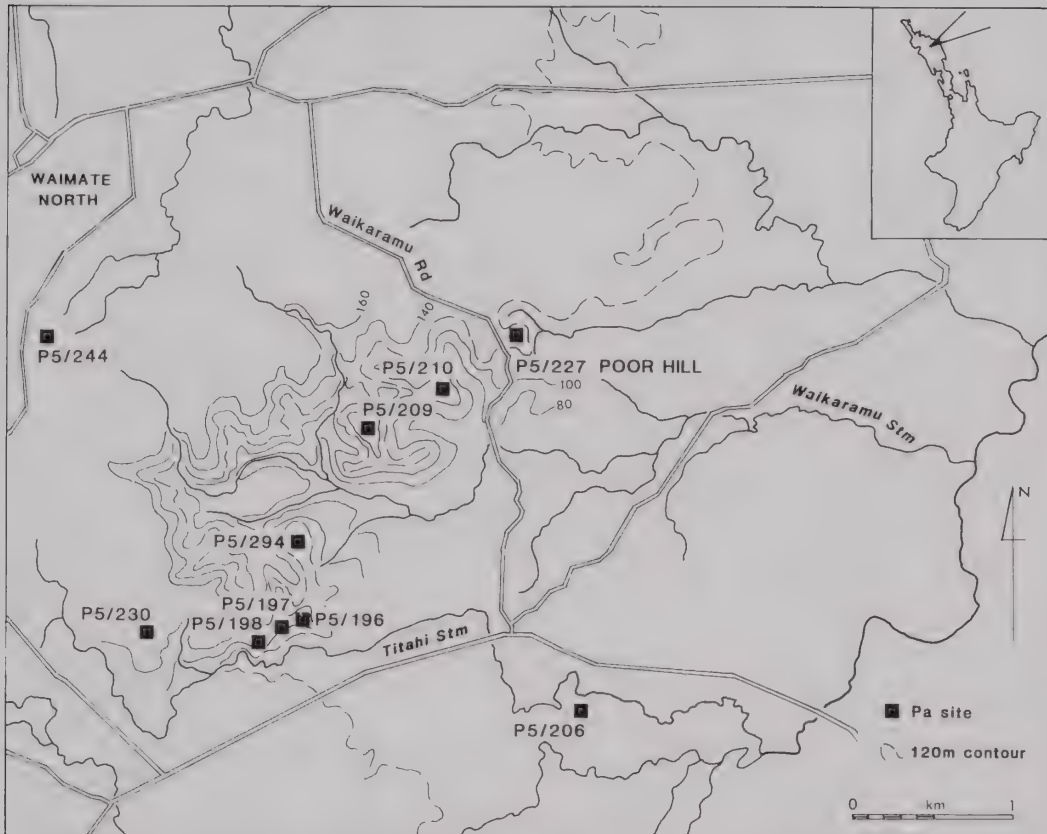


Fig. 1. Location map showing the position of Poor Hill and the positions of nearby pa.

P5/196,197,198 Tapahuarau, P5/206 Ruahoanga, P5/209(i) & (ii) and P5/210 Kaiaia or Te Tou-o-Roro; P5/227 Poor Hill (Ngaungau); P5/230 Nga Puke-pango; P5/244 Pahangahanga; P5/294 Taka-poruruku.

purchased by Mr Williams of Te Morenga: on the east by land purchased by Mr Davis of Kahia and friends.” The position of site P5/227 conforms very closely to this description although there are two ridge pa (P5/210 and P5/209) nearby, to the west (Fig. 1) that could also be contenders for the name. The site record forms tentatively give the name Kaiaia or Te Tou o Roro to these sites. Site P5/227 is, in contrast, included within the Old Land Claim 4 of the Reverend R. Davis (J. Lee MS). I have therefore provisionally accepted that the site P5/227 is Ngaungau pa.

Traditionally Ngaungau was a named pa associated with the defeat of the Ngati Pou by the Ngapuhi in the mid to late eighteenth century (Lee 1983:151). Sissons *et al.* (1987:108) say that “. . . the Ngati Hineira lived north of this place [Rua Hoanga pa, P5/206] having captured Ngaungau pa during the conquest of Te Waimate.” They point out that dating traditional evidence is difficult but genealogies suggest that the conquest of Waimate may have taken place in the 1770s (1987:146). Although there is no direct evidence, it is possible that the area was resettled by the Ngati Hineira after the defeat of the Ngati Pou.

The Site

The site is situated 1.5 km south east of Waimate North (Fig. 1) on a low rounded ridge end. It consisted of a fortified pa on top of the ridge end (now almost obliterated) and numerous terraces down the slopes where a large settlement was formed external to the pa (Fig. 2). The main ridge runs in an east-west direction but near its end it curves northwards forming a natural shallow north-facing amphitheatre. It is on the northern spur that the fortifications were situated and the majority of terraces have been cut into the amphitheatre slopes below the pa.

The pa on the ridge end was not of very imposing appearance and its natural defences were minimal. Along the southern approach a well preserved ditch was cut across the flat ridge top. It was not unusually wide or deep and the inner bank was low and fairly narrow. Some evidence remained for the former presence of a lateral ditch on the western side. The interior of the pa contained several low, north-south running terraces, one of which contained a rectangular stone hearth. There was also evidence for a well-developed drainage system. The northern end of the pa rose to a low knoll and then dropped into a discontinuous ditch that had a short eastern lateral extension. A narrow inner bank was present along the eastern side but was not evident in the north-western area. No surface evidence for pits was found within the defences or elsewhere on the site but storage could have been above ground or at some distance from the settlement. The local clay soils compare unfavourably with the volcanic soils of the Taiamai Plains a few kilometres to the south. This may have restricted the agricultural potential of the land around the pa.

There were few terraces down the north-western and western flanks of the pa. The most impressive aspect of the site was the tiered effect of the numerous terraces cut into the amphitheatre slopes. The site had been cleared some 20 years before by the previous owner but these terraces had, subsequently, been well-preserved by the scrub cover and, after the recent clearing, their sharp angles still stood out (Fig. 3). There was a complex inter-connecting drainage system associated with the terraces and some of those from the pa drained down the eastern slopes to join those of the terraces in the amphitheatre where the drains were especially noticeable and well preserved. There was speculation at the time of the survey as to whether the terraces were for agriculture rather than habitation because of their protected northern aspect and drainage systems but test excavation suggested they were built originally as living terraces. Three terraces were tested, all on the eastern slopes. It was on the biggest of the lower terraces that evidence for a large structure was exposed by Gorbey's excavation.

The terraces on the site appear to be of two types. The upper ones immediately below the eastern side of the pa were generally long and narrow and some shared a common back scarp. Several were divided into sections by drains or depressions forming "semi-detached" terrace groups. The lower terraces and those around the amphitheatre gully were squarer and generally larger. None of these shared a common scarp. Their floors were more level than the upper terraces and they were in better condition, before ploughing.

On the basis of "on site" observation and a study of the site plan the terraces were divided into two discrete groups, an upper western set and an upper and lower



Fig. 2. Plan of site P5/227, Poor Hill.



Fig. 3. Photograph of Poor Hill (P5/227) after clearing, looking south-west.

amphitheatre eastern set (see “terrace division” on Fig. 2). The area of each terrace was measured and the terraces put in rank order on the basis of their size. The difference between the two terrace groups was subjected to a statistical test based on these ranks (Mann-Whitney “U” test). The probability that the difference between the two groups arose by chance is less than 0.01, which is significant (G. Law pers. comm.). This does not take into account the changes in slope angles (cross-section line A-B runs from about 10° to 16° down the slope) which may have influenced terrace construction. This seems unlikely, however, because terraces on the eastern side of the amphitheatre run from near the top of the ridge to near the bottom regardless of the slope angle and all these terraces follow the amphitheatre pattern. Gorby, in his notes, also commented that the terraces fell into two distinct groups and suggested that they could represent different social units. There could be a number of other reasons for the two contrasting groups such as changes in function or a time difference. There is, however no evidence that the pa and the amphitheatre terraces were not contemporary.

The site is undated. A search, after the area had been disced, revealed no trace of European artefacts which might have been expected on a site say from 1810-1830 onwards and none have been found during subsequent farming operations.

Artefacts

Several complete adzes, a few roughouts and some stone material were collected on the ridge during scrub clearing operations. This collection is held at the Auckland Institute and Museum. A few wooden artefacts have also been recovered from the swamp gully below the pa.

The completed adzes and at least one of the roughouts (38741) appear to be Northland gabbro on the basis of hand held specimen identification (S. Best pers. comm.). The completed adzes (Table 1) are all polished and quadrangular in cross section. There is also one of a similar type, found recently, in the possession of the owners of the site. All the adzes have short straight bevels (once described as a typical Northland type by the late Vic. Fisher of the Auckland Museum). The adzes represent a very interesting, well provenanced, collection.

Another of the roughouts (38745.1), a large, quadrangular, coarse-grained piece of stone with no bevel has three shallow grooves running lengthwise up the "back", separated by four low shoulders. The function of the grooves is unknown. They do not appear to be natural. The roughout measures 21 cm in length, is 9 cm wide and 3.6 cm thick.

There were several pieces of modified stone as well as chert, an obsidian core and a flat stone with kokowai (red ochre) on it.

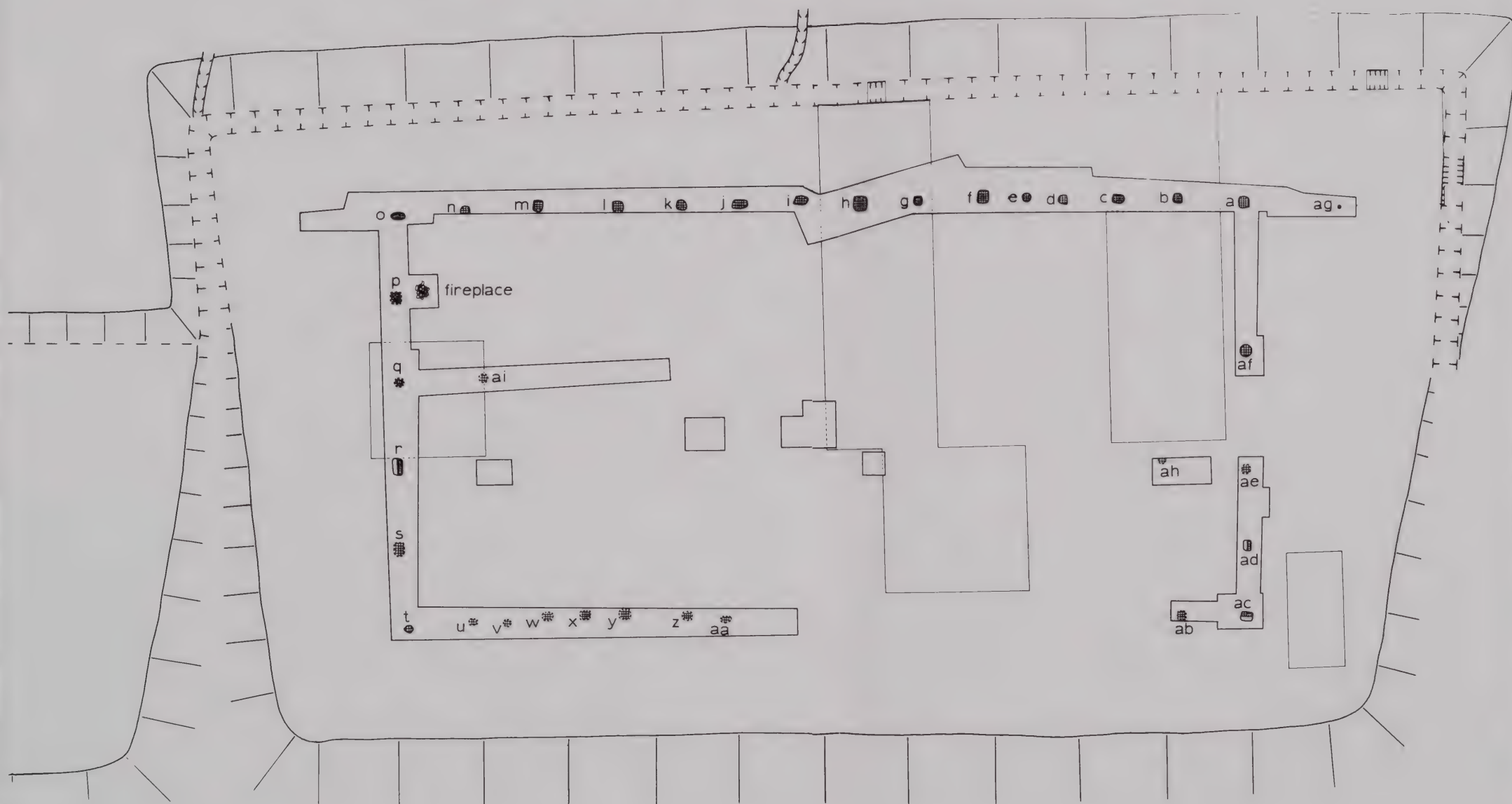
Table 1. Adze measurements.

| Museum number | length cm | width cm | thickness cm |
|---------------|-----------|----------|--------------|
| 38744.1 | 24.1 | 8.1 | 3.2 |
| 38744.2 | 21.6 | 7.6 | 2.5 |
| 38744.3 | 16.4 | 6.5 | 2.5 |
| 38744.4 | 12 | 7.1 | 3 |
| --- | 10 | 6.5 | 1.8 |

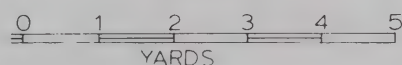
The Excavation

Because excavation within the pa defences could have proved too complex for the time available, and in view of the well preserved external terrace system, Gorbey decided to investigate the largest amphitheatre terrace below the pa (Fig. 4). This was the lowest most northerly one and it measured approximately 22 x 11 m. The back of

POOR HILL, WAIMATE NORTH. The Large Terrace.



SCALE.



KEY.

POSTHOLES.

- edge defined
- post impression blank
- unexcavated

DRAINS.

- excavated
- unexcavated
- Shallow excavation
- Deep excavation

Fig. 4. Original plan of the large amphitheatre terrace, showing the excavated area, by K. Gorbey.

the terrace was cut into the slope to form a lowish scarp and the front (eastern) surface appeared to have been built up with the resultant spoil to extend the platform over the slope. The back drain led into side ones which became "V" shaped depressions directing the water to the amphitheatre gully.

Except for a very thin layer and a scrappy litter layer the surface of the ground proved to be the original floor of the terrace. This produced little except large smudges scattered about the excavation. It was decided to follow one of these down into the soil profile. At an approximate depth of 30-40 cm the smudges turned into beautifully defined postholes where they entered the hard clay pan. By vigorous trenching the posthole line was followed, by-passing the confusing smudges on the way. It produced the layout of posts as shown on the terrace plan (Fig. 4). Gorbey suggests that, due to the acid(?) soil environment, the postholes were not clearly evident until from 30-50 cm down. Their upper profiles had been removed by chemical and soil action.

The posts appeared generally large and rectangular. A few postholes were fully excavated and, of these, a number were clearly slabs and buried quite deep (no details of measurement or depth are available). The posthole distribution suggested a large structure some 15 x 7 m in size.

A cluster of rocks and charcoal was found inside the structure against the south-west wall near posthole "P". Gorbey interpreted this heap as a fireplace but said it was not a four sided hearth. No entrance way was established although the presence of a small posthole "ag" north of but in line with the west wall could possibly suggest the presence of a light porch.

Parts of the interior of the structure were tested but only the possible postholes "ai" and "ah" gave any indication of some sort of roof support. There was no evidence for a large centre back post to support a ridge pole. Testing confirmed the surface evidence of the drain running along the back and sides of the terrace. Only a few flakes of obsidian and chert were found. These are not now available.

A smaller, now unidentified, terrace was tested by Trevor Hanson at the same time. Two sides of what appeared to be a small rectangular structure were located (Gorby pers comm.). There seemed to have been a replacement of posts so that the structure could have stood for some time. A core (stone unspecified) with several fitting flakes came from this terrace.

At the time of the original survey one of the upper semi-detached terraces (Fig. 5) on the eastern slopes below the pa (not an amphitheatre terrace) was also tested by Davidson. Only the north-eastern third was excavated. A very shallow deposit of top soil and litter was removed to reveal an occupation surface and a line of insubstantial postholes along the front of the terrace. There were also indications for scattered stakeholes and a diffuse semicircular burnt patch containing charcoal showed on the surface. This was centrally placed on the terrace but only half was exposed by the excavation. It was about 80 cm in size.

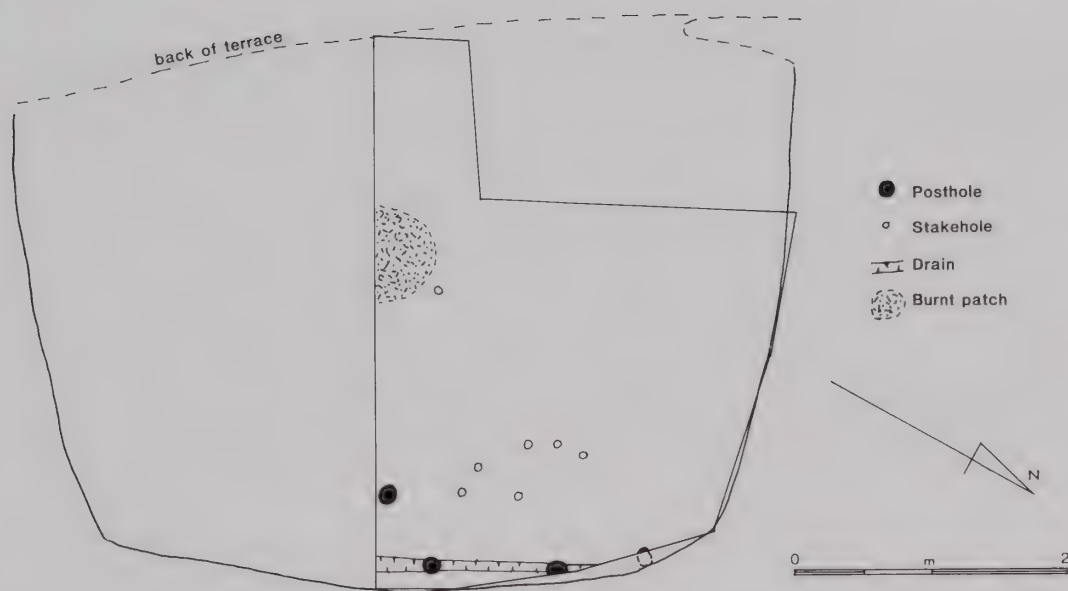


Fig. 5. Plan of Davidson's excavation on an upper "semi detached" terrace.

At the time little was known archaeologically about the construction of prehistoric Maori dwellings and this terrace evidence was regarded as too flimsy to have represented a living structure but, with hindsight, it seems probable that the two insubstantial terrace structures were both houses.

All three terraces indicated a one phase occupation.

Conclusions

The Poor Hill site, consisting of a ridge pa and associated external terracing lies within the historical Old Land Claim 4 of the Reverend Richard Davis. The site is most likely the traditional Ngaungau pa.

The pa was ploughed over, the ditches and banks destroyed and fences, holding yards and a water tank placed on the site soon after it was surveyed and excavated in 1967. The amphitheatre terraces were also modified but most are still clearly visible on the landscape.

At the time of the survey the site was considered unusual because of the number of well preserved large terraces cut into the slopes below the pa itself.

The amphitheatre terraces, which are statistically different in size from the terraces immediately below the pa, appear to be later additions because of their state of preservation. It is not clear whether the pa was still in use at the time.

The excavation by Gorbey on the lowest and largest amphitheatre terrace provided posthole evidence for a large building. However, insufficient knowledge of

the whole plan of the structure, and especially its interior arrangements, makes further interpretation in detail difficult. Because of its size it could represent an important structure, but its low position does not conform to the historical interpretation for siting the main *wharepuni* of an open settlement and there is little flat ground around it which could be interpreted as an open space or *marae*.

The testing of two other terraces indicated that they were for living and had small flimsy houses on them. There was only one phase of occupation on each terrace.

The lack of any European artefacts, in spite of considerable soil disturbance from farm discing and the excavations, together with the traditional evidence, suggest that the site was pre-European and probably of late 18th century origin.

There appears to be no obvious focus to the set of amphitheatre terraces unless the main or ceremonial position was on the top of the ridge or within the pa. Still, if one takes the large house on the largest and lowest amphitheatre terrace as the most important late building on the site and accepts that these terraces are later than the ridge pa, it could be postulated that access to the undefended settlement was up the gully making the house the focal point for groups approaching that part of the site. The structure could then be seen as a reception or visitors' house but this would indicate the concept of a village type very different from the traditional view of a Maori settlement.

There also remains the possibility that the structure may not have been a house at all but an unroofed, strongly built, rectangular enclosure serving some unknown function.

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